

Dr. Peterson

University System of Georgia Student Government Officers Meeting

8:30-9:30 a.m. Friday, Feb. 7, 2014, Student Services Building

Welcome to Georgia Tech. We're glad to have the privilege of hosting your group this year.

You have been selected by students at your institutions to represent their interests with a number of groups. You are ambassadors representing the student body to your administration, and also to the Board of Regents and the state legislature. I understand you toured the Capitol yesterday, and many of you met with your legislators. Many times, SGA leaders are the best advocates with state leaders and policy makers.

It has been great to work with Nick and his team this year. Nick and our other SGA leaders organized a Georgia Tech student day at the capitol for the first day of the legislative session. Georgia Tech is proud to have six student interns at the State Capitol this semester, and one participating in our Washington DC internship this semester. Programs like these are fortifying the Institute's Strategic goal of ensuring that a commitment to public service is a fundamental characteristic of graduates.

As a university president, I am very grateful for the caliber of student leadership we have here. When I arrived almost five years ago, the undergraduate SGA president and vice president presented me with a very thoughtful white paper on undergraduate student priorities. It was researched and written by an undergraduate student government special committee that they had formed for the presidential transition. It outlined areas of pride and areas of improvement. We've addressed a number of those, including a more diverse curriculum, an increased emphasis on service learning, living-learning communities, as part of our 25-year strategic plan. In fact, students were involved in the development of that plan.

I'm assuming most of you have been in your position for more than half the year. What do you want to accomplish before the spring? How do you want to lead others so that together you can accomplish your goals?

I was asked to share my thoughts on leadership. One of the best explanations I've seen is John Maxwell's model for levels of leadership. It is a progression from the lowest level (#1, to the highest, #5)

1. **Position** (People follow you because they have to. Basic entry level of leadership because you have a title)
2. **Permission** (People follow you because they want to. You have a greater level of influence. People know that you care about them as a person, and you create win-win situations)
3. **Production** (People follow you because of what you have done for the organization) People are working together to accomplish a goal. You become a change agent.
4. **People Development** (People follow you because of what you have done for them) You mentor someone and they grow. You're a model for others, and expose them to growth opportunities.
5. **Personhood** (People follow you because of who you are and what you represent) It will take a lifetime of proven leadership to attain this level. Followers are loyal and sacrificial. People follow you because they share the same vision, and because of your integrity.
 - Strong Personhood Examples: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
 - When President Kennedy laid out his vision for the U.S. to go to the moon in 9 years, we had not even orbited the earth successfully. It was a tremendously powerful vision he laid out.
 - **Level 5 differentiates good vs. great leadership**

- **Leaders articulate the vision, provide direction, and encourage experimentation.** They translate “my vision” into “our vision.” They are coaches, touch emotions, and are servant leaders.
 - I generally practice “no fault” management.
 - Good judgment comes from experience; a lot of that comes from bad judgment.
 - When I first became a manager, a department head at Texas A&M told me “Eighty percent of the problems you faced will be communication problems. The other 20 percent will be special communication problems.”
- **Leaders take risks**
 - Examples from NSF trip to Antarctica (on the ice, your red “survival” bag, McMurdo Station, what you would have missed if you had not gone)
- **The importance of vision:** When we started Georgia Tech’s Strategic Plan, we took great care to include the entire Georgia Tech community and the general community. We emphasized thinking big. We planned for 25 years because it required vision, and risk. In 2009 when we started the planning process, the economy tanked. It would be easy to be discouraged right now (budget, no merit raises). The Strategic Plan has allowed us to look forward.
- **Leaders are inclusive.**
- Dr. William Wulf, past president of the National Academy for Engineering drove home the importance of diversity in a lecture I had the privilege of hearing several years ago. One of the things he said was that aside from the social, moral and ethical rationale for having a diverse workforce or a diverse group in any organization, it just makes good sense. Basically, his point was that if you don't have a diverse group that you're working with then you have designs that are never thought of, ideas that are never imagined, and dreams never dreamed. It really does take a diverse group of people to come up with the best ideas and the best designs.
- **Leaders have confidence.**

- Art Hansen was president of Georgia Tech from 1969 to 1971, and later chancellor of the Texas A&M University System. I met him when I was at Texas A&M, and admired him greatly. He gave some good insight on leadership. He emphasized the need for confidence because while good information is important, the facts rarely provide unqualified guidance. I quote:

“One of the traits that characterizes good leaders is confidence and the ability to instill that confidence in others. Typically those who wish to accomplish anything of significance have just a little more confidence than the facts would justify. It is something that outstanding executives have in common with brilliant political leaders and great artists. It is true of societies as well as of individuals. Every great civilization has been characterized by confidence in itself.

Lacking the confidence, too many leaders add ingenious new twists to the modern art which I call ‘how to reach a decision without really deciding.’ They require that the question be put through a series of clearances within the organization and let the clearance process settle it—or take a public opinion poll and let the poll settle it—or devise elaborate statistical systems, hoping that out of them will come unassailable support for one course of action or another.

This is not to say that good leadership cannot profit enormously from good information. If the modern leader doesn’t know the facts, they are in grave trouble, but rarely do the facts provide unqualified guidance. After the facts are in, the good leader must in some measure emulate the little girl, who when asked by her teacher what she was drawing told her she was going to draw a picture of God. The teacher said, ‘But Mary, no one knows what God looks like’ to which Mary responded, ‘They will when I get through.’”

- Your phone interview with NASA and how you were reading the book on heat transfer while on the phone.
- Leadership is a combination of confidence, taking risks when needed, being inclusive, and depending on good people to go alongside you. The leadership experience you’re receiving this year will serve you well as you begin your careers.

- Thank you for joining us at Georgia Tech today. Many times what you do in your leadership roles at your institutions is behind the scenes, and thankless. Not today. On behalf of all of us in the University System, thank you for your leadership role at your institutions.